



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**NEBRASKA CATTLE BUYER PLEADS GUILTY IN SCHEME TO
RIG BIDS FOR THE PURCHASE OF CATTLE**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- A Nebraska man pled guilty today to conspiring to rig a bid for the purchase of cattle from a rancher in Western Nebraska, the Department of Justice said.

The one-count felony charge, filed today in U.S. District Court in Nebraska, charges Joseph Burford of Morrill, with conspiring to rig a bid for the purchase of cattle in violation of Section 1 of the Sherman Act. The conspiracy occurred in August and September of 1995, the Department said.

Under the plea agreement, Burford will cooperate with federal officials. As part of the filed agreement, Burford and the government will recommend to the Court that Burford pay a \$20,000 fine and make restitution to the rancher. The government will also recommend that Burford serve a prison term.

Joel I. Klein, Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Antitrust Division, said, "These schemes deprive ranchers of their legitimate earnings and interfere with our free-market economy. Ranching and farming are important to the American economy. The Division is committed to protecting American ranchers and farmers from illegal anticompetitive conduct that harms their livelihoods."

According to the charge, the defendant and his co-conspirators carried out the conspiracy by agreeing to submit a rigged bid for the purchase of cattle. They carried out the conspiracy by discussing among themselves the prospective submission of a bid for the cattle, agreeing on a bid price to be submitted, and agreeing upon and designating the winning bidder.

The investigation was conducted by the Chicago Office of the Antitrust Division, in conjunction with the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration of the United States Department of Agriculture.

"This prosecution is a benefit of the close working relationship we have developed with the USDA in recent years to closely monitor the meatpacking industry," Klein said.

Important assistance was also provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's office in North Platte, Nebraska, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Omaha, Nebraska, and the State of Nebraska Brand Committee.

The maximum penalty for an individual convicted under the Sherman Act is three years incarceration and a fine which is the greatest of \$350,000, twice the pecuniary gain derived from the crime, or twice the pecuniary loss caused to the victims of the crime.